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ABSTRACT

The article reviews concerns related to the selection and administration of career interest inventories for handicapped secondary students, discusses utilization of the results within an educational setting and considers the importance of cooperative efforts. Useful instruments for students in grades 9-12 are listed and administration procedures and their possible modification are reviewed. A review of literature pertaining to the selection of an interest inventory for use with special-needs students and cautions regarding the use of such inventories are included. Five types of information from career interest inventories are identified: job titles, career clusters, preferences for work factors, personality types, and needs. Classroom activities designed to enhance career development exploration, and orientation based on interest inventory results are described. It is concluded that the career interest inventory used judiciously, can be a useful tool in exploring interests and possible vocations for the secondary school student. (Author/CL)

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Career Interest Inventories and the Special-Needs Secondary Student

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Abstract

Career interest assessments can be an important component of education for the special-needs student, especially at the secondary level. The purpose of this article is to review concerns related to the selection and administration of career interest inventories, discuss utilization of the results within an educational setting and discuss the importance of cooperative efforts. A review of literature pertaining to the selection of an interest inventory for use with special-needs students and cautions regarding their use is included. Personal experience contributed to the sections relating to the utilization of results and the importance of cooperative efforts. It can be concluded that the career interest inventory used judiciously, can be a useful tool in exploring interests and possible vocations for the secondary school student.

Career Interest Inventories and the Special-Needs Secondary Student

The purpose of this paper is to acquaint the reader with the use of career interest inventories with special-needs students at the secondary level. Practical concerns related to the selection and administration of interest inventories will be covered in the first section. This will be followed by a practical "how-to" discussion on utilizing the results within an educational setting. The final section relates to the importance of establishing and strengthening collaboration between and the cooperation of those involved with the students.

Concerns

Selection of Instruments

There has not been a particular interest inventory which has been hailed as superior for any type of special-needs student (Anderson, 1982). Many instruments are on the market, with more being developed, improved or researched all the time. Brolin (1976) and Patten (1981) recommend the use of interviews as the best method for assessing the interests of special-needs students. Anderson (1982), Botterbusch (1983) and Finch & Crunkilton (1979) feel that evaluators can maximize their accuracy and identify common interest themes by examining the students' expressed, manifest (observed) and inventoried interests.

The prime factors to consider when selecting an interest inventory are the kind of information you wish to obtain and the type of student with whom you want to use the inventory. First, one must determine the purpose of the inventory. One will want to determine whether it measures students' interests for general areas of interest (career clusters), specific occupations, preferences for factors related to work, work values, work aptitudes or a combination of these. Some inventories compare the students' responses to those of employees who are satisfied with their careers. This type of inventory gives one an idea of how similar the respondents' answers are to those of employees in various occupations and is, therefore, somewhat predictive of future employment satisfaction.

It is very important to consider the particular disability, age, maturity, learning style and attention span of the students when deciding which instrument to use. Therefore, the format of the inventory is of prime consideration. Anderson (1982), stated that according to Backer (1979), paper and pencil tests seemed less useful the greater the students need for vocational services. Brolin (1976) stated that assessment of the career interests of more handicapped students, in particular the retarded, is very difficult. Three guidelines for assessment procedures suggested by Kiernan and Petzy (1982) included using media, oral rather than written materials, and concrete rather than abstract items. Some authors, such as Mastie & Westbrook (1983), suggest you take the inventory yourself and pay particular attention to the instructions, amount of reading required, the reading level, type of response required, presentation style (audio-visual, visual-verbal, etc.) and the visual or auditory figure ground.

Many of the concerns regarding the use of career interest inventories with special-needs youth were documented in an article by Anderson (1982). These concerns included testing for student's interests in occupations which may be beyond their skills, reading and verbal comprehension requirements of the inventories, the short attention span of some students and the need to make modifications in order to administer the inventories to specific groups of students.

The experience of this evaluator has been that the aforementioned concerns must be taken into consideration. In addition, it seems logical that for those with more mild learning difficulties, one would want to consider their secondary and post-secondary education and training goals as well as their work values and attitudes. For those students whose reading and comprehension skills are more limited, one would certainly want to use an instrument which requires little or no reading, is easy to understand and requires simple responses. This evaluator feels that it is most important to determine the work values and attitudes of those students whose primary handicapping condition is an emotional disturbance. Since this group of students presents a broad range of abilities anyway (Hewitt, 1968; Kaufman, 1977), it may be necessary to consider each student individually.

Other aspects to consider are the appropriateness of the instrument, administration procedures, cost and scoring. It is important to determine what is measured by the inventory and the population for whom it was intended and/or normed upon (Zytowski, 1973).

Of prime consideration is the reliability and validity of the instrument. Many times you may have to write to the company for specific information. Other sources are Buro's Mental Measurements Yearbook, A Counselor's Guide to Vocational Guidance Instruments, Tests in Print III and Vocational Tests and Reviews.

The costs may be incurred up front, as for re-useable materials, or may be ongoing for the re-stocking of consumable goods. There may also be an additional cost for scoring if the instrument is machine-scored. One would want to know about other aspects of scoring, such as how long and how easy an inventory is to score, as well as how the results are presented.

Useful Instruments. Those instruments which this evaluator has found to be useful with 9th and 10th-graders include the Virginia VIEW (Vital Information for Education and Work) which is based on the Michigan Occupational Information System or MOIS, Career Assessment Survey Exploration (CASE), Picture Interest Exploration Survey (PIES), Wide Range Interest - Opinion Test (WRIOT), Reading-Free Vocational Interest Inventory (RFVII), Career Occupational Preference System (COPS) - Level II (Intermediate) or R (Revised) and possibly the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ).

For 11th and 12th-graders, particularly learning disabled youth, additional inventories to consider include the Kuder - Form E, Holland's Self-Directed Search (SDS), the Harrington O'Shea Career Decision-Making System (CDM) and the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII). Even though they are representative of the types of inventories on the market today, the reader will probably want to investigate other instruments.

Administration Procedures

As with any instructional activity, students should know the purpose for the activity and be motivated to participate in it. To some degree, interest inventories often resemble tests. Therefore, it is imperative that the student know she/he will not be graded and that there are no right or wrong answers. Inform the students that you want to know their thoughts, feelings, or impressions about different jobs or factors related to work. Their responses will be regarded as "right" for them personally. Don't hesitate to reiterate the fact that interest inventories are not graded, although you may want to explain that their responses will be organized according to the directions you are given. Explain to them that this is done to make it easier for you to interpret and review the results with them. This will in turn make it easier for the students to judge for themselves how accurate the results were, as well as be able to use those results to learn more about themselves.

Simple and inexpensive modifications can facilitate the administration of interest inventories and help meet the individual needs of special students. These include the following techniques:

- individual or small group administration
- demonstrations
- use of paper guides
- highlighting key terms and/or phrases
- use of overhead transparencies
- brief and/or simplified explanations of terms

- o simplified directions
- o close monitoring of students' responses.

Care should be taken in that the aforementioned modifications may interfere with the validity or reliability of some standardized instruments (Alcorn & Nicholson, 1975).

Utilization of Results

It is a good teaching practice to follow up on activities which the students are required to do. Follow-up can take place both inside and outside of the classroom through independent study, sharing the results at home, or through activities guided by teachers and/or counselors (Kiernan & Petzy, 1982). Teachers and counselors can use these results as a means of assisting the student in exploring careers or making career-related decisions. General types of uses include exploration of career clusters or specific occupations of interest, referral for a vocational evaluation either for a general exploration or in order to determine the viability of a particular vocational placement, job try-outs or shadowing experiences, and recommendations for placement in a vocational course.

Cautions

Many times students will misinterpret the results to mean that they are able to pursue the career(s) indicated by the results of the inventory (Finch & Crunkilton, 1979). It is imperative that students understand that

this is not the purpose of an interest inventory - the inventory can only give an indication of each student's interests (Finch & Crunkilton, 1979).

Caution should be taken with regard to making assumptions based on limited information. The student's teachers can help by providing information on the student's strengths and weaknesses, academic abilities, socialization skills and physical development. Counselors can also be an essential resource in the career development of the special-needs learner.

Types of Information

There are five general types of information one can gain from career interest inventories. Usually the results are in one of two forms: specific occupations (job titles) or general occupational (career) clusters. However, they may also be presented as preferences for work factors, personality types and needs.

When the results are listed as job titles it is imperative to inform the student(s) that these titles are not mandated jobs which they should or must obtain, nor are they sure indicators of a successful career or course placement. The student should use the job titles as a guide for learning about specific occupations and for increasing his/her self-awareness by comparing these occupations to his/her abilities, aptitudes, values and educational goals. Teachers and counselors should take care not to make course or career placement recommendations solely on the results of one test or inventory. Kiernan & Petzy (1982) have stated that students' choices should be made using prior experience and instruction rather than hope or fantasy.

In order to maximize understanding and/or interpretation of the results, this evaluator feels it is necessary to confer with the student regarding the results. This conference can greatly enhance one's ability to make a generalization regarding the results. Types of generalizations one might make include that the student:

- is interested in a select number of occupations,
- does not have enough information regarding specific careers or the world of work in general to generate a personal interest in many occupations or (an) occupational cluster(s),
- has a strong desire to work and/or is willing to do just about anything,
- has an exaggerated sense of skill or ability and feels able to perform any and/or all jobs, or
- is in need of career exploration, based on any of the above.

Occupational clusters generally follow the model developed by the United States Department of Labor in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (1977). One will find the number of clusters in an inventory ranging from six to fifteen, depending upon which instrument is used.

This evaluator has observed the following general results with 9th and 10th-graders using interest inventories giving the results as occupational clusters:

- relatively "flat" or negatively skewed profiles in which no strong interest is indicated/expressed for any career cluster,

- positively skewed profiles which seem to indicate the student wants to do just about everything, or
- a profile which indicates the student prefers more occupations in one or more of the clusters than any of the others.

Some inventories such as the Virginia VIEW and WRIOT, give indications of the types of work factors preferred by the student. These work factors include such things as:

- physical demands, e.g., strength, eyesight, talking/hearing, climbing/balancing.
- work environment, e.g., indoor/outdoor, heat/cold, odors, noise, hazards.
- temperaments or attitudes, e.g., creativity, risk, variety, repetition, persuasion, decision-making.
- interests, i.e., data, people or things.
- aptitudes, e.g., numerical, verbal, spatial perception, finger and manual dexterity, color discrimination.

It is this evaluator's belief that for many special-needs students information regarding work factors may be more useful than determining which occupations or career clusters are of interest to the student. For example, through a variety of techniques, one is able to determine:

- whether a student is more inclined to work with data, people or things,
- which physical demands she/he prefers and/or is capable of performing.

- o what working conditions the student prefers or is limited to (due to medical or other reasons), and
- o which temperaments are most pleasing to the student.

This information "plugs into" the Guide for Occupational Exploration, or GOE (1984) and can be combined with more accurate assessments related to the students' general educational development, specific vocational preparation, abilities and aptitudes. At this point, the teacher, counselor, or evaluator has enough information to locate many occupations which the student could either explore or in which she/he could gain employment. Of course, the opportunities for training and employment, as well as the occupational outlook in the geographical area, should be considered prior to making recommendations.

Through the use of the GOE, one can determine which occupations match the students' preferences. Information gained from each student's educational, psychological and/or vocational evaluation reports can be added to this information in order to make accurate recommendations for career exploration, coursework or job placement.

Inventories such as the Virginia VIEW, COPS, and CDM take into consideration the students' educational and/or training goals. The CDM and COPS also indicate which clubs and school subjects relate to the results. It is presumed that the students will investigate these clubs and courses independently or be guided by teachers or counselors. Teachers or counselors may even wish to guide the students with regard to their educational aspirations. These professionals are the logical choice for this

role, given their knowledge of the student's specific academic abilities and social skills deriving from contact with the students' parents and access to school files.

Classroom Activities

What types of classroom activities can be conducted now that the inventories have been administered, scored and the results are available? Your first consideration, as a teacher, will be the size, maturity and ability levels of your class (Phelps & Lutz, 1977). One will also want to consider the type of presentation and interaction desired in your classroom.

Classroom discussions can take place readily and fit into nearly every lesson plan. During the orientation and exploration phases of career development, generally grades 7-10, learning should increase its focus on key concepts such as the ideal of a career vs. a job, vocation vs. avocation, paid vs. volunteer work, characteristics of a good worker and the specific requirements necessary for most jobs (Brolin & Kokaska, 1979). The purpose of these discussions is not to influence the students' values but to enable them to explore concepts which are new to them and thereby enrich their knowledge about life and work. Career preparation is usually the main focus of the students' high school years. This phase is marked by putting into practice what has been and is still being learned during the career orientation and exploration phases. The focus becomes directed specifically toward skill attainment, including job seeking, finding and keeping skills (Brolin & Kokaska, 1979).

This knowledge can aid students in setting realistic goals and making appropriate decisions for their lives and thus increase the number of opportunities available to them for successful transition to community life. Many times students feel that they will only work if they make a lot of money or if the job satisfies some other need. Career education aids students in looking beyond the concept of paid employment as the basic ingredient of a fulfilling life. Through guided classroom instruction, student's discover that the benefits of unpaid work include gaining experience, clarification of their career goals, identification and development of skills and increased self-awareness. They may learn that through avocations, those needs not fulfilled by a job can be met through hobbies, leisure time and recreational activities.

They can begin to realize that a job may be a career in itself or it may serve as a means of gaining the experience and knowledge necessary for a future career goal. Some individuals may decide that they do not even want a "career" per se, but that the most important reason for working is to fulfill other needs such as for increased social stature or economic security.

Career orientation, and especially exploration, focus on specific requirements of jobs as well as characteristics of "good workers". Discussions may not be enough in and of themselves to increase a student's knowledge of job requirements and positive work attributes. Classroom demonstrations and especially application through daily practice make for more realistic learning situations. Class rules and assignments regarding attendance and punctuality; attention to behaviors such as cooperation with

peers and acceptance of constructive criticism; and the ability to work independently yet request help when needed can all be tied to the world of work. Specific work requirements such as quality, speed and accuracy can also serve as a focal point for relating classroom experiences to real life. However, one cannot necessarily expect these skills to be generalized from school to a work or leisure environment (Forness, 1982).

What cannot be accomplished through classroom discussions and practical learning experiences may be gained through research assignments and activities. Specifically, job characteristics such as the work factors discussed earlier, length of education and training needed for a job, average salaries and career ladders are easily researched using the excellent career education materials on the market today. Research also facilitates the student's exploration of related occupations found on the career ladder or within the career cluster.

It is hoped these activities would in turn enhance the student's ability for self-analysis. The type of self-analysis suggested here includes identification of strengths and weaknesses by developing a checklist or profile and using this as a tool for establishing goals for personal improvement. Students can also establish educational goals based on a comparison of their present skills with basic requirements for occupations which are of interest to them. Basic requirements for employment can include such things as prerequisite skills or abilities, the completion of required coursework or training programs, and other variables such as age, weight and height. Students can make comparisons of themselves to

occupations on a career ladder or compare employees in two jobs of interest to themselves with regard to entry requirements, future prospects for advancement and specific job duties.

Interviews provide another method of gaining information regarding careers. Through interviewing trainees, employees and employers, students can gather information on specific job tasks, the general work environment and working conditions, the relationship of school to work and the positive attributes of a good employee and employer.

Field trips and hands-on experiences are the most realistic life-like tools for gaining information about careers. The audio-visual approach to learning is the next best since it simulates real life and is more interesting for the student (Sheppard & Vaughn, 1977). Educators will want to incorporate as many of these simulated and real experiences into the classroom as possible.

Cooperative Efforts

In order to insure that quality services are being provided to special-needs students, cooperative efforts must be established. Ideally, all of the professionals involved with the students must unify their efforts (Brolin & Kokaska, 1979; Dahl, Appleby & Lipe, 1978; Phelps & Lutz, 1977). Those included in this group would come from business and industry, vocational and special education, vocational rehabilitation, counseling or social services. Phelps and Lutz (1977) offer this definition of what they call a "cooperative instructional arrangement":

> A cooperative instructional arrangement is a vehicle for initiating the development of a formalized, cooperative plan for providing career-related instruction and supportive services for a special needs learner. Essentially, it is a plan for systematically coordinating available school and community resources for an individual learner. [emphasis added] (p. 196).

They further state that it is of the utmost importance that those involved are enthusiastic and committed to serving students through a cooperative approach.

Probably the single most important factor in enabling a program to be effective and successful is administrative support. Administrative support is crucial for the development of an appropriate curriculum and in facilitating access to community resources. A cooperative arrangement which works can give administrators the rationale to justify the expansion and improvement of services (Phelps & Lutz, 1977). Important components of a cooperative arrangement include regular communication, site visits and joint planning.

There are also benefits to be seen in the classroom. The teacher who wishes to integrate career education and the use of career interest inventories into the classroom will experience many positive outcomes. Those outcomes could conceivably include that students:

- will be more attentive, show more interest in learning and increase their participation in class;
- will increase their knowledge about themselves and use it to set realistic goals;
- will utilize the expertise of professionals facilitating their growth and transition to community living;
- will increase their comprehension of the relationship between classroom learning and "academics", and employment and community living; and
- may replace feelings of frustration and failure with hope through the development of concrete goals and plans.

Teachers can maximize these benefits by collaborating with other professionals and professional services. A teacher might seek out:

- counseling and guidance to assist students in making plans,
- vocational evaluation to determine aptitudes and abilities,
- vocational education to develop skills for vocations and/or avocations,
- job placement professionals to assist students in seeking, finding and keeping jobs,
- the business community to increase their awareness of special-needs and to increase our understanding of the job market today, as well as enable the business community to visibly participate in a service which is supported by them,

- vocational rehabilitation which can provide services not available in school, as well as provide services beyond school to those still in need of support, and
- community service to provide activities facilitating integration into the community.

In essence, benefits of cooperative relationships between special education, vocational rehabilitation and vocational education can facilitate planning and a smooth transition from one service to another (Will, 1984), and thus enhance the overall quality of the service being provided.

Conclusion

A review of the literature indicates that career interest inventories may be used cautiously with special-needs students, even though there is no one instrument which is regarded as the best. Modifications regarding the administration and interpretation of the results of an interest inventory should also be made judiciously. Guidelines for selecting an instrument include consideration of the type of information to be obtained, the characteristics of the students and of the instrument itself, administration procedures, cost and scoring. Useful instruments are included in the Appendix, although the reader will want to investigate others as well.

Even though the relationship between the results of an inventory and utilization of the results within the classroom have not been proven statistically, good teaching practices tell us that a follow up must occur. The results of interest inventories seem to lend themselves best to career exploration activities of many kinds. These activities can take place within the classroom setting, at home and through activities guided by teachers or counselors. The selection of the activity will depend on the information given in the results of the inventory.

It is most important to caution the reader to remember that interest inventories can at best only give an indication of each student's interests. Assumptions about the student and especially vocational placement decisions should only be made after taking into consideration many other details about the student.

The student and professionals involved with the student can benefit from cooperative efforts. Cooperation between professionals insures that the results of interest assessment are utilized and expanded upon through career orientation, exploration and preparation activities.

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Appendix

The following is a list of interest inventories mentioned in this article with their publisher's addresses.

1. Career Assessment Survey Exploration (CASE)
   American Assessment Corporation
   P.O. Box 112
   Gardendale, AL 35071

2. Career Occupational Preference System (COPS)
   EDITS
   P.O. Box 7234
   San Diego, CA 92107

3. Harrington - O'Shea Career Decision - Making System
   AGS Publishers' Building
   Circle Pines, MN 55014

4. Kuder - Form E
   SRA
   Science Research Associates, Inc.
   155 North Wacker Drive
   Chicago, IL 60606

5. Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ)
   Vocational Psychology Research
   Elliot Hall
   University of Minnesota
   Minneapolis, MN 55455

6. Picture Interest Exploration Survey (PIES)
   Education Achievement Corporation
   P.O. Box 7310
   Waco, Texas 76710

7. Reading-Free Vocational Interest Inventory
   Elbern Publications
   P.O. Box 09497
   Columbus, OH 43209

8. The Self-Directed Search
   Consulting Psychologists Press
   577 College Avenue
   Palo Alto, CA 94306

9. The Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory
   Consulting Psychologists Press
   577 College Avenue
   Palo Alto, CA 94306

10. Virginia VIEW
    Virginia VIEW
    1301 USOC
    Virginia Tech
    Blacksburg, VA 24061

11. Wide Range Interest-Opinion Test
    Jastak Associates, Inc.
    1526 Gilpin Avenue
    Wilmington, DE 19806